



## Your resume must grab an employer's attention in less than a minute

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It may sound harsh, but busy employers don't spend much time perusing the hundreds of resumes they may receive each day. When you are searching for a job, your resume must deliver the greatest impact in the least amount of time. All of your accomplishments, education, and work experience must be presented in a clear, concise format that a potential employer can quickly scan. Make sure your resume is error-free! Even one seemingly minor grammar or spelling mistake gives an employer reason to toss your resume in the trash. Legal Authority employs professionals who can ensure that your resume is concise, accurate, and attention-grabbing so it will get the attention it deserves.

### **Know thyself**

Your resume is your primary marketing tool. In order to portray yourself accurately, you may need to do some self-assessment. Think about what you want your resume to say about you. Identify your strengths and weaknesses, and make sure your most important accomplishments are highlighted. Then, consider your career goals. Where do you hope to be in five years? In ten years? Does your resume convey a sense that you have set goals for yourself? Employers want to hire someone who is on an upward trajectory, not a downward one.

When creating your resume, make sure you give a complete and accurate representation of your work experience, skills, and achievements. For example, if you have experience in will and estate planning and in litigation, you should include both. A firm that specializes in will and estate planning will focus on that part of your resume and a litigation firm will notice your experience in that field. There is no need to tailor your resume to a specific field or firm, unless you are only interested in working in one field and are only applying to firms and companies that specialize in that area. Diverse experience can make you seem more well rounded. The more marketable skills you include, the more marketable you will seem. Keep in mind, though, that your resume should be focused on legal experience. The only exception is for significant business experience at the senior management level or above.

### **Your resume is not a novel**

Generally, resumes are limited to one page. However, if you have extensive experience, two pages may be appropriate. Remember, though, that employers are likely to spend just 20 seconds reading your resume. Of course, you should portray your experiences and accomplishments accurately, but use some discretion. For example, if you have been a practicing attorney for 10 years, it's probably safe to leave off that clerkship you did in law school. Employers want to see specifics, and they are most interested in your recent achievements.

### **Appearance Does Matter**

Your resume is a representation of you at your professional best. As such, it should look flawless. The resume, cover letter, and envelopes should all be printed on high-quality bright white or off-



white paper. The heading style on your resume and cover letter should match, in order to give the impression of a matched set of tasteful stationery. Put your name in bold and in a larger font than the rest of your contact information. Follow your name with your address, telephone number, and email address. You should always use a private email address to give the appearance of discretion during a job search. Think about the message your email address conveys, as well. If, say, your friends know you as buffstud@yahoo.com or unicorncollector@aol.com, you should invest in a professional-sounding email address from one of the free services. Even something like

expertatty@earthlink.net

could be misconstrued. It may not be too exciting, but you can't go wrong with a simple

firstnamelastname@ispprovider.com construction.

Remember how your resume should be impeccable? It's worth repeating: your resume must be completely free of any typographical errors. Check it and double-check it. Just one error can make you seem unprofessional and sloppy and could well cost you a job.

Clean, simple formatting makes for enhanced readability. In one glance, an employer needs to be able to grasp your relevant skills and experience. Emphasize the names of your current and past employers so that employers can easily see where you have worked. Make sure that margins and formatting are consistent. Also, use a simple font such as Times New Roman, Garamond or Arial. You are trying to portray yourself as the consummate professional, so this is not the time to express your personality with a "specialty" font.

### **Resume Sections**

We've already covered contact information. Here are some other important considerations to keep in mind when formatting your resume:

#### *Objective/Goals section*

This has no place on a legal resume, as your goal is self-evident. It is only useful in non-legal job searches.

#### *Education*

If you have graduated within the past two years, your education should come at the top of your resume. After two years, you should weigh your education against your experience. If your experience is strong and your law school was not highly ranked, lead with your experience. If you graduated five years ago, but have not been practicing, lead with your education. Your law school education should come first, followed by your college education. High school information should not be included. If you are currently in law school, include your anticipated graduation date.

#### *Honors and Activities*

It is usually easiest to include these in your education section. For instance, if you were on Law Review, include that under your legal education. If you graduated magna cum laude from college, include that with your college listing. Many honors and activities will be self-explanatory; however, if



you received an unusual distinction, it is useful to include a brief explanation. Examples of activities to list include memberships in student organizations and relevant volunteer work. If you have held leadership positions, those should be included as well.

If you have been out of school for some time and have earned honors and distinctions unrelated to your education, you may want to include a separate honors section.

### *Experience*

Your work experience should be listed in reverse chronological order. Remember to keep the focus on legal experience. If you are still in school, you should list any legal internships you have held. You may also wish to list employment you held while in college or after college, but keep those mentions brief. Your resume should always be weighted toward legal experience, but business and managerial experience can help fill in any gaps.

How you describe your job duties is highly important. Use dynamic action verbs that emphasize any leadership roles or special projects you may have undertaken. Avoid the passive voice. Remember, you are trying to capture a potential employer's interest. Do not exaggerate your duties, but be sure to cast them in the best possible light. Try to be creative when listing your experience. For example, if you held an internship while in law school, chances are you wrote briefs and memos. So did every other law student who held an internship. Was there anything special about your memos or briefs? Were you complimented on your writing style? What else did you do during your internship? Whenever possible, quantify your accomplishments. For example, it's not enough to state that you are a successful litigator. Instead, you might want to consider including the percentage of cases that you have won or successfully settled. Finally, your current job duties should be listed in the present tense. Past job duties should be listed in past tense.

### *Bar Memberships*

If you are an experienced member, listing the bars to which you have been admitted can be extremely important if you are undertaking a nationwide job search. All admitted attorneys should list their bar affiliations and dates of admission.

### *Hobbies*

Hobbies are a tricky area. Often, they are just filler and can detract from the professionalism of your resume. Think about it. Would you rather discuss your skills and experience with a potential employer or waste your interview time talking about your golf game? However, if you feel that one of your hobbies is truly outstanding, you could include it. Perhaps it will spark an interesting conversation. Also, if your resume is sparse, you may need to include a hobbies section to fill it out. Be sure to include any volunteer work or internships first, though.

### **Points to Remember**

- You don't have much time to get an employer's attention. A concise approach is best.
- Highlight all your marketable skills and experience.
- Do some self-assessment. Know your strengths and weaknesses, and keep in mind what you hope to gain from your job search.



- The appearance of your resume counts. Make it easy to read.
- Focus on your legal experience.
- Use evocative action verbs to describe your duties. Avoid the passive voice.

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### **Conclusion**

These guidelines are just that, guidelines. They can help you craft a memorable resume, but they are not strict rules. The main principle to remember is that an employer will not spend an excessive amount of time reading over your credentials. You should strive to create a professional, succinct resume that highlights your strengths. The team at Legal Authority can help you meet that goal.